

A Nazi in the Hand is Worth Two in the Bush

**Chronology of 1988 Bush Campaign
Controversy over the presence of Fascists
& Nazi Collaborators in the Coalition of
American Nationalities**

Chip Berlet

George Bush apparently will deliver a kinder, gentler nation with the help of some former Nazi collaborators nested within the Republican Party. Contrary to most press reports, the Bush campaign never repudiated the ethnic fascists, racists, and antiSemites clustered inside his election committee. Instead with appropriate irony, the Bush Campaign utilized the Big Lie technique to sidestep the charges.

When the George Bush presidential campaign was charged in September 1988 press accounts as having recruited a tainted ethnic support coalition, it responded with a number of conflicting statements. At various points during the controversy spokespeople for the Bush campaign announced:

“They would investigate the charges; they would not investigate the charges; they were shocked by the charges; they could not be held responsible for screening everyone; they were unable to substantiate the charges; the unsubstantiated charges were reckless political attacks; no one would resign until the charges were substantiated; the persons resigning admitted no wrongdoing; the anti-Semites had resigned from the campaign; and, the issue was closed.”

Clearly there are some mutually exclusive positions in the above list.

The charges primarily came from three sources: a report by Detroit-based freelancer Russ Bellant, published by Political



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Research Associates (PRA) in Cambridge; a series of articles by reporters Larry Cohler and Walter Ruby appearing in *Washington Jewish Week* and articles by David Lee Preston in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*.

The story focused on the Bush campaign's recruitment of Eastern European nationalists who had emigrated (primarily from Latvia, Rumania, Bulgaria, and the Croatia section of Yugoslavia) to the US after World War II. [See *Hitler's Last Laugh*, p. 17 this issue.]

As the Bellant Report revealed, some of the post-WWII Eastern European emigres had fled their homelands because of their wartime allegiance to Nazi Germany, their support for political fascism and ultra-nationalism, or their participation in anti-Jewish pogroms and the Nazis' genocidal "Final Solution" of Europe's so-called "Jewish Question." These emigre ethnic activists, who champion liberation for what they call the "Captive Nations," had gravitated towards the Republican Party based upon a shared emphasis on rolling back communism and gaining independence for the nations near the Baltic coast and the Balkans which now are under Soviet domination. Those emigres who held fascist and anti-Semitic views generally kept these sentiments hidden while toiling on behalf of George Bush and the Republican Party.

The Bellant Report for PRA includes a photograph of Bush

at a July 1988 campaign rally in Michigan co-sponsored by the Anti-Bolshevik Bloc of Nations, a group frequently described in print as pro-fascist or pro-Nazi. There is also reproduction of a page from the official Republican Party 1984 "Guide to Nationality Observances" with text calling for a celebration of "Croatian Independence Day," which some history books refer to as the beginning of a brutal genocidal campaign to liquidate Jews and Serbians. During that campaign, hundreds of thousands were murdered under the direction of the newly-founded Croatian State fascist leaders.

Yet history can be a slippery item when the media fail to do their homework. A chronological look at the controversy shows how artfully the Bush campaign sidestepped the charges, and rewrote the history of WWII, while simultaneously placating both its Jewish and eastern European emigre constituencies.

The Charges

8/2/88—A Bush campaign news conference announces the formation of Coalition of American Nationalities to coordinate the campaign activities of various ethnic groups.

9/01/88—Political Research Associates mails galley copies of the report by Bellant to twenty reporters and news outlets. Press embargo is listed as A. M. 9/9/88.

9/08/88—The story officially surfaces in the press when *Washington Jewish Week* charges that several Bush ethnic advisory committee members are well-known anti-Semites and pro-fascists, including people who opposed the Justice Department's Office of Special Investigations (OSI) and its probe into emigre Nazi collaborators in the US. The article focuses on Bush ethnic advisors Jerome Brentar and Ignatius Billinsky but also includes material on the Republican National Committee (RNC) Heritage Groups Council, Florian Galdau, Philip Guarino and Laszlo Pasztor using material from the Bellant Report although the report is not cited until the third article in the series.

Round One

Mark Goodin, spokesperson for the Bush campaign, announces "The Reagan-Bush Administration supports OSI and George Bush will support OSI as president," and pledges the campaign

will look into the allegations. "If there is anything to them, we'll take action."

James Baker, Bush campaign chairman, adds, "There is no place in this campaign for anti-Semitism, racism, bigotry or people who espouse those views. Any individuals who espouse those views will not be welcome in this campaign."

Response in the Jewish community is quick. Henry Siegman, executive director of the American Jewish Congress, says the charges are a shocking revelation: "It suggests a high degree of either insensitivity or incompetence on the part of George Bush's staff. I'm sure George Bush is personally unaware of the sordid personal history of these people. But now that he has been made aware of them we have every right to expect him not only to remove these people but to repudiate what they stand for."

Albert Vorspan, senior vice president of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations calls the composition of the Coalition of American Nationalities "outrageous and frightening. The inclusion of notorious extremists in a committee with such close ties to the vice president violates the principles that George Bush has publicly espoused."

Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League, urges "an immediate investigation by the Bush campaign of the backgrounds of members of the Bush campaign ethnic coalition who are known anti-Semites and have been linked to Holocaust revisionist and anti-OSI activities." Foxman adds, "There is no place in any political campaign for anti-Semites. The League urges that these persons be summarily removed."

9/9/88—Mark Goodin announces that Jerome Brentar has resigned, saying Brentar's "association with [convicted Nazi war criminal] John Demjanjuk put him at odds with Vice President Bush." No mention is made of the more substantial charges regarding Brentar.

As for Galdau and Guarino, Goodin says, "We have absolutely no substantiation at this point of any of these charges."

Michael S. Miller, executive director of the Jewish Community Relations Council, however, says his group has information supporting the *Washington Jewish Week* descriptions of Jerome Brentar, Florian Galdau, and Philip Guarino. "There's absolutely no doubt in my mind that these three individuals have expressed sympathies with Nazism, with fascism," Miller tells the *New York Times*. The Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles is also cited by the Times as having corroborating background material.



President George Bush stands next to Bohdan Fedorak at Captive Nations banquet in Warren, Michigan.

9/10/88—The *Philadelphia Inquirer* runs an article by David Lee Preston which corroborates much of the material in Washington Jewish Week. Preston cites the forthcoming Bellant Report.

9/11/88—The first section of the Bellant Report is officially released to the press. The report describes how the Republican Party has been recruiting ethnic fascists, racists, and antiSemites for over 20 years, through its Heritage Groups Council.

9/11/88—The *Washington Post* carries a story on Bush advisor Fred Malek, who resigns from the Bush campaign almost immediately.

9/11/88—The *Boston Globe* carries a summary of the charges made in the Bellant Report concerning the Republican Heritage Groups Council.

9/12/88—The Bush campaign announces five more resignations: “We have been attacked unfairly by George Bush’s political opponents. These ... attacks are aimed at neutralizing the support George Bush has and will continue to have in the ethnic community.”

In addition to Brentar, who previously had resigned, the five new resignees include Florian Galdau and Philip Guarino as well as Ignatius Billinsky, Laszlo Pasztor, and Bohdan Fedorak.

Mark Goodin dismisses these charges as “little more than politically-inspired garbage ... the campaign looked into the allegations against these individuals and was unable to substantiate them.”

Bush responds to reporters questions by saying: “Nobody’s giving in. These people left of their own volition. We’re not accusing anybody of anything ... We’re getting into a very peculiar deal where some people are accusing people ... I don’t like it a bit.”

A few days later, Radi Slavoff, national co-chairman of

Bulgarians for Bush, becomes the seventh ethnic panel member to resign.

9/15/88—The entire Bellant Report is officially released. The report, as was mentioned above, includes a photo of George Bush on the campaign trail at a July 1988 event co-sponsored by a proNazi group, the Anti-Bolshevik Bloc of Nations. Also reproduced is a 1984 Republican ethnic pride calendar which urges the celebration of “Croatian Independence Day.” The Croatian state was run by a Nazi-puppet government which oversaw the slaughter of over 500,000 Serbians and Jews.

The Counterattack

9/15/88—With the resignations out of the way, the Bush counterattack begins. Mark Goodin denounces Bush’s political enemies for disseminating “reckless allegations.” Although he claims the Bush campaign has not seen the Bellant Report, Goodin says “The campaign has been unable to substantiate any of the allegations ... They are some of the most reckless allegations leveled against anybody ... This has the unmistakable stink of Boston Harbor.” Bush campaign supporters begin to refer to the charges as “Sasso-like attacks,” (Dukakis campaign manager John Sasso) and tell reporters the Bellant report is part of a Dukakis dirty-tricks effort. In fact, Political Research Associates has no ties to the Dukakis campaign or any political entity, but the smear sticks. Most major media drop the story.

For those newspapers still covering the story, the Bush campaign’s statements start to unravel. *Washington Jewish Week* reports that Florian Galdau says he had never been asked to resign and had no intention of doing so. According to the newspaper, Galdau “said he had never signed a statement issued by the Bush campaign in his name and that of four v(hers whose resignations the campaign announced.” Says Galdau, “I did not resign. Why should I resign? I don’t want to resign. I was appointed [to the Bush committee] ... and I don’t think they have the right to ask me to resign.”

Galdau’s son says: “[The Bush campaign] called my father [September 12, 1988] and denied they had any information whatsoever on any of the allegations made [against] him. Neither [the caller] or anyone else in the Bush campaign asked my father to resign-and he did not resign...If they ask him to resign, he will tell them to go to hell.”

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Meanwhile on a *Cable News Network* program Jerome Brentar insists he never resigned from the Bush ethnic panel; and he denies that the Nazis deliberately gassed Jews during the Holocaust.

Bush spokesperson David Sandor quickly responds: "This is obviously in conflict with what we have said. We stand by what we have said We didn't force them to resign George Bush is their friend. They will continue to support him. They stand by their statement."

9/16/88—Jerome A. Brentar tells the *Philadelphia Inquirer* he is "definitely still in the campaign, still in the coalition ... I was asked to step down. I told them that I'll step down if they send me a letter outlining why I have to step down, what I did wrong to earn this degradation Until I get such a letter, I feel I'm still part of the Coalition."

The Bush campaign finally takes its only stand relating to the actual issues involved, and issues the following statement:

"Jerome Brentar and this campaign disagreed We were at fundamental odds over some very important beliefs in this campaign toward racial and religious tolerance, and he was asked to step down as far as we're concerned he's no longer part of this campaign."

9/18/88—*Philadelphia Inquirer* reporter David Lee Preston reports that since 1969, several dozen alleged Nazis, fascists and anti-Semites have held leadership posts in the Heritage Groups Council. He quotes Allan A. Ryan, Jr. (now with the legal office of Harvard University but formerly director of the Justice Department's OSI war criminal probe) who found the Bellant Report to be "well documented and reliable."

Preston also reports that in 1972 a convicted Nazi war criminal Boleslavs Maikovskis of Minneola, N. Y. served on the advisory board of the Latvian-American section of the Republican's Heritage Council for the Re-Election of the President; this ties the first known war criminal to the Republican Party and documents the long-standing nature of the problem.

9/22/88—In *Washington Jewish Week* the Republican National Committee's (RNC) Kathryn Murray admits she has not read the evidence contained in the Bellant Report, but claims the report is "filled with ridiculous charges" and "insults all ethnic Americans." Murray says the RNC has no intention of examining evidence of the extremist background presented against anyone in the report. The paper, however, reports Anti-Defamation League of the B

'nai B'rith (ADL) has evidence backing charges against four of the persons resigning from Bush campaign.

The *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* quotes Albert Maruggi, RNC press secretary, saying there were no plans to investigate the backgrounds of any of the ethnic group members cited in the Bellant Report. Incredibly, four of the Bush ethnic panel members who resigned, Guarino, Siavoff, Galdau, and Pasztor, are still active in the RNC's Heritage Groups Council.

9/27/88—The *Boston Herald* carries a column by Alan Dershowitz in which he reveals he has independent knowledge of some of Bellant's charges: "I first heard about the presence of Nazis in the hierarchy of the Republican Party as far back as 1970." In the course of working on the New York governor's race, Dershowitz says he "learned that several members of a Republican 'Captive Nations Committee' were Nazi sympathizers who had been personally involved in the Holocaust in Europe, as well as with racist and neo-Nazi groups in America."

9/27/88—*New York Post* columnist Pete Hamill in a column titled "George Bush and his fascist fan club" quotes Menachem Rosensaft, president of the Labor Zionist Alliance and leader of the International Network of Children of the Holocaust:

"He accepted their resignations. And he said he was against anti-Semitism. But when they were gone, an aide said the charges against these men were 'unsubstantiated and politically motivated.' Clearly Bush wanted them out once they were exposed, but he still wants the votes of their constituency."

9/29/88—Ron Kauffman, Northeast political director for the Bush campaign tells the *Jewish Advocate* newspaper the Bellant Report is "totally outrageous." Mark Goodin denounces Bellant's report and says the people who voluntarily resigned from the campaign "vigorously defended" themselves against the charges. "We were not able to substantiate any of the allegations ... These individuals maintain fierce opposition to the charges. We certainly accept

Bush's Fascist Fan Club

Ignatius Billinsky, a long-time critic of the US Justice Department's Office of Special Investigations (OSI), is president of the Ukrainian Congress Committee of America which Bellant describes as "heavily influenced but not totally controlled by" anti-Semites, collaborators with Hitler, and apologists for Nazism.

Jerome Bientat has suggested the OSI search for Nazi war criminals is a communist plot, and worked with groups claiming the Holocaust is a Jewish hoax.

Bohdan Fedorak, also a leading critic of OSI, hosted the July 1988 campaign appearance by George Bush co-sponsored by the pro-Nazi Anti-Bolshevik Bloc of Nations.

Florian Galdau is described by Nazi hunter Simon Wiesenthal as the leader of the Romanian pro-Nazi, Ultra-Semitic movement in New York City.

Philip Guarino is linked in published accounts to the fascist-oriented P-2 Masonic lodge in Italy, and has made racist statements about non-white ethnic minorities.

Fred Malek, according to the Washington Post, while serving as an aide to President Nixon, compiled lists of employees with "Jewish-sounding" names—names of persons Nixon suspected were part of a "Jewish Cabal" at the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Akselis Mangulis, a Latvian member of CAN (Coalition of American Nationalities), is accused of belonging to the Latvian Legion which during WWII was connected to the Nazi

SS.

Lazlo Pasztor, who recruited many of the ethnic leaders with questionable backgrounds for the Republican Heritage Groups Council, himself briefly served during World War II as an official in a Nazi-collaborationist Hungarian government controlled by an anti-Semitic Hungarian nationalist movement the Arrow Cross.

Radi Slavoff is charged with working in the pro-fascist Bulgarian National Front, and the National Confederation of American Ethnic Groups, a group with a history of leaders who championed anti-Semitic and pro-Nazi causes. Slavoff heads up the Heritage Groups Council which has become a safe harbor for anti-Semites and pro-Nazis emigres.

that explanation." [At no time during the controversy did anyone identifying him or herself from the Bush campaign contact Political Research Associates or Russ Bellant].

11/1/88—Charles R. Allen Jr., an expert on the emigre Nazi network, questions the candor of Bush when he "professed ignorance of [the] pro-Nazi backgrounds" of the ethnic campaign supporters. In a *Village Voice* article, Allen produces a 1983 photograph of George Bush shaking hands with Yaroslav Stetsko, then leader of the pro-Nazi Anti-Bolshevik Bloc of Nations. The photo, taken at a White House reception, was autographed: "To the Honorable Yaroslav Stetsko with best wishes—George Bush." Allen also produced a 1976 RNC memo in which Bush, as RNC Chair, is reported to have reviewed the past work of the Republican Heritage Groups Council and set goals for the coming year.

11/4/88—The *Philadelphia Inquirer* reports charges concerning the background of Bush ethnic coalition leader Akselis Mangulis. Even before the story appears in print, the Bush campaign announces Mangulis has resigned, although the woman who answers the phone at the Mangulis residence tells reporters Mr. Mangulis was not asked to resign and would not resign.

The Press Response

The story of the ethnic fascists in the Republican Party and the Bush campaign was widely ignored after an initial flurry of charges and counter charges. Other than the Boston Globe and Philadelphia Inquirer, no major newspaper or electronic news organization covered the story in depth and examined the validity of the accusations.

Prior to the election, the substance of the charges in Bellant's report were not covered in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Associated Press*, or *United Press International*. Coverage was

extensive in the Jewish daily and weekly press, as well as alternative weeklies and monthlies, but for most of the country the story was never examined outside coverage of the initial resignations.

Following the election, on November 19, 1988, the *New York Times* ran an Op-Ed page column by Russ Bellant. As Bellant noted, Bush "owes Americans a complete explanation."

To be sure, the story was complex and involved aspects of eastern European history which were obscure to most Americans, but this should not be an excuse for how poorly the media handled serious allegations concerning a major political party and its presidential candidate. To this day, many of the individuals named by Bellant, *Washington Jewish Week*, *The Philadelphia Inquirer* and the *Boston Globe* are still active with the Republican Party. It would appear that the "Big Lie" is still an effective technique for misdirecting the media. •

[This article was adapted from a longer article in the Boston Phoenix.]

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